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ABSTRACT

Creative dramatics activities may offer opportunities for active application of skills necessary to the development of higher level thinking processes. Drama affords the participants the opportunity to concentrate attention upon individual elements in the real and imagined world. Within this framework, the student, while attentive to detail and sequence, increases powers of accurate observation, increases the ability to identify cause-and-effect relationships, and is actively involved in inferential thinking. Drama experiences integrated with vehicles designed to provide opportunities for the application of reading skills and the interpretation of written communication also offer individual extensions of the relevancy of that which is read. The creative action that can go on in classrooms is a process which requires the integrative curriculum planning of teachers and students. Ownership in the development of ideas, the analysis and synthesis of creative thought related to literature, the relevant interrelationship of human thought and individual talent in the expressive arts, and the creation of a creative dramatics performance model transform cognitive and affective taxonomies into active classroom activities. (HCD)

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Learning the ABC's through D - Dramatics

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creative process through
the arts

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LEARNING THE ABC's THROUGH D - DRAMATICS

The experienced classroom practitioner realizes that the complexities of human interaction constitute the basis for productive learning, for application, development, and refinement of skills. Development of the intellect requires the use of the four basic elements of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Underlying these elements is the essential need to transform each element into active thought patterns, to communicate and recommunicate ideas engendered by external sources with self. In order to have something to communicate, to reveal it as part of self, one must turn to the oral as well as written expressions of others. In other words, speaking and writing in all probability rely considerably upon listening and reading. When considering the comprehension process, one must conceive of each element as complementary to the others.

Language acquisition is an application of interrelated communication skills that evoke higher level thinking processes. Creative dramatics activities in instructional design may offer opportunities for active application of skills necessary to the development of such thinking processes.

Reading may be regarded as a catalyst of thought processing leading to creative apperception. The reader's mind may become involved in images, dialogues, sounds, and conjectures as a result of understanding the author's written passages. Smith and Barret (1974) indicated that encouragement of creative thinking in conjunction with reading selections is possible at all academic levels for students who have mastered basic decoding and comprehension skills. The searching mind is encouraged and extended within a learning atmosphere rich in diversification of activities. The individual mind is guided meaningfully and freely in synthesizing information with direct experience (Bloom, 1956; Wagner, 1976; Way, 1967).

Active participation in creative thinking relative to daily lessons should be an important instructional objective of the curriculum (Piaget, 1970; Strauss, 1972). Creative thinking, in this sense, refers to higher levels of cognitive thought processing (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 1964; Smith, 1969). McIntyre (1974) highlighted the teacher's role in planning the language arts program with an emphasis upon the development of communication skills, interpretive and problem solving skills, and stressed the use of dramatic techniques as a useful means toward such objectives.

Drama affords the participants, both actor and audience, the opportunity to concentrate attention upon individual elements in the real and imagined world. Within the framework of this concentrated attention, the student, while attentive to detail and sequence, increases powers of accurate observation, increases the ability to identify cause-and-effect relationships, and is actively involved in inferential thinking. Drama makes possible an integration of subject matter with feelings, interests, and needs (Smith & Barret, 1974; Wagner, 1976; Way, 1967). Cheifetz (1971) observed that in portraying a role, an individual relies upon imagination and experience for some inner connection, some understanding, some comprehension. Way (1967) emphasized a distinction between drama and theatre in that theatre connotes communication between actors and audiences, while drama transcends mere knowledge into moments of direct experience integrated with vicarious experience.

Freedom of expression and the use of one's imagination may be viewed as prerequisites as well as natural outgrowths of reading. The reading process is an application of interrelated communication skills that evoke higher level thinking processes. Language is thus continuously upgraded (Wagner, 1976). Drama experiences integrated with vehicles designed to provide opportunities for the application of reading skills and the interpretation of written

communication offer individual extensions of the relevancy of that which is read. Until rather recently, basal reading programs and accompanying teachers' manuals have included some sketchy reference to optional drama activities, without specific integration with skills in thought processing. In truth, drama in classroom strategies should be utilized across the curriculum (Moffet, 1973; Wagner, 1976; Way, 1967).

Cognitive and affective dimensions of learning must be considered in attempting to influence progress and growth in comprehension and motivating practices reflecting such dimensions may include pre- and postreading activities on both a small group and an individual basis.

One aspect of motivational activities related to classroom reading and language arts instruction, creative dramatics, offers students opportunities to experience awareness of specific objectives in their purposes for reading, to develop their knowledge of inner and outer experiences, to develop and share insights, to communicate with others, and to participate in creative planning. The overriding philosophy is that cognitive growth and development are continuously expansive and lead simultaneously to a better attitude toward reading on the part of the student.

Kantor (1973) addressed the conflict between advocates for more creative expression in our schools and those who call for a greater emphasis upon the acquisition of basic skills and factual knowledge and proposed a theoretical call for a synthesis and balance of creativity and the language arts in curriculum development. Thus, conflict of priorities and objectives is really nonexistent. There exists, instead, a complementary development of language skills. Rather than a de-emphasis of basic skills, the learning process becomes an agent for the practical application of such skills.

Green (1974) in exploring self-involvement as a means to increased affective and cognitive learning, proposed that the degree to which a student is involved in a variety of learning situations and in the use of communication skills will influence the degree to which he, or she, understands others and the content of subject matter. Taylor (1971) and Hardy (1974) noted the effective use of creative dramatics as a means for a reader to use inner experience to understand others, to integrate personal expressive potential that is growing and functioning naturally with language development. Courtney (1974) summed it up well in the observation that all learning is dependent upon dramatic imagination.

A.C.T.-R is an acronym for the creative action that can and does go on in classrooms at varying grade levels--the "association of creative thoughts: READIN' and 'RITING" enhanced by the active interaction of dramatic and expressive arts. Rather than a gimmick, or a "cookbook approach," it is a process which requires the integrative curriculum planning of teacher and pupils. Ownership in the development of ideas, the analysis and synthesis of creative thought related to literature, the relevant interrelationship of human thought and individual talent in the expressive arts, and the creation of a creative dramatics performance model transforms cognitive and affective taxonomies into active classroom activities. Such taxonomies, while useful in identifying learning objectives and in searching for the function of the human intellect, are not hierarchical and isolated in nature. They represent the complexities of thought process which, simplistically stated, may be activated simultaneously and imaginatively as reaction to real and vicarious accounts of events and information.

Capitalizing upon the basic assumption that dramatic involvement activates and develops fuller interpretive and evaluative comprehension, a

model characterized by adaptability for use within a variety of learning environments, has been created. A.C.T.-R, Inc. has chosen the theme COURAGE, has drawn upon the theatre, its language, music and movement, American and classic literature and prose, as well as original composition and has integrated them in a performance model. The development of such a model requires classroom practices which reflect:

- (1) a quest (research)
- (2) analysis (individual and group interaction)
- (3) dramatic expression (active involvement with literature)

Such practices offer students and teachers opportunities for internalization, re-creation and re-communication of the multitude of concepts, emotions, and settings projected by authors and composers. The dynamics of classroom learning experiences may be effectively harnessed through the development of creation models which include:

- (1) individual or small group activity
- (2) theme selection
- (3) theme analysis
- (4) group dynamics in task responsibility and time-line development
- (5) research
- (6) writing a performance script
- (7) rehearsal and refinement
- (8) classroom performance
- (9) evaluative critique
- (10) follow-up or extension

One basic element that is crucial to such activity is careful, productive planning, initiated by teacher and cooperatively developed between teacher and students and within working groups. Creative interaction relies upon careful, integrative planning. The human mind, its imaginative complexities and energies, is the source for such planning and creativity.

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